

Message Text

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SUBJ: CROP PROSPECTS, 1974-75 HARVEST -- MAURITANIA

SUMMARY: THOUGH IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO PREDICT WITH ANY
CONFIDENCE CROP PROSPECTS FOR 1974-75 SEASON, MOST KNOWLEDGE-
ABLE MAURITANIANS ARE CONFIDENT THAT GOOD RAINFALL SO FAR AND NEAR
RECORD
FLOODING OF RIVER SENEGAL PRESAGE A GOOD YEAR.

1.ENROUTE TO NEMA SEPTEMBER 19 INSPECT GRAIN AIRLIET
OPERATINS, TOOK OPPORTUNITY OVERFLY SENEGAL RIVER BETWEEN
BOGUE AND KAEDI AND STOPPED-OFF AT KAEDI FOR FIRST HAND LOOK
AT NORTHERN END OF MAURITANIA'S "BREADBASKED". THOUGH LOCAL
OFFICIALS I TALKED TO BELIEVED SENEGAL FLOOD CRESTED ABOUT
SEPTEMBER 14 AT HIGHEST LEVELS RECORDED SINCE RECORD-HIGH
FLOODS OF 1950 AND 51, LARGE AREAS RANGING FROM THREE TO FIVE
KILOMETERS ON EACH SIDE OF THE RIVER WERE STILL UNDER WATER. A
FEW SMALLER VILLAGES WERE INUDATED DURING EARLY SEPTEMBER
CRESTS, BUT TIMELY DIKE REPAIRS AND EXTENSIONS AT BOGUE AND
MAEDI SAVED THOSE TWO MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS FROM FLOODING.
TRACKS ALONG BOTH SIDES OF THE SENEGAL ARE, OF COURSE,
IMPASSABLE, THOUGH RIVER BARGE TRANSPORT WILL CONTINUE THROUGH
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SEPTEMBER AND PERHAPS EARLY OCTOBER.

2. FARMERS AND OFFICIALS AT KAEDI WERE CONFIDENT THAT EXTENSIVE BOTTOM

LAND FLOODING AND GOOD, NEAR OR ABOVE AVERAGE RAINFALL
WILL MEAN A BUMPER CROP THIS YEAR. RAINY SEASON VEGETABLE, "SMALL
SORGHUM
(PETIT MIL" AND MAIZE CROPS WERE ALREADY
BEING HARVESTED IN KAEDI-BOGUE REGION. PLANTINGS FOR BOTTOM
LAND SORGHUM CROP MAY, HOWEVER, BE DELAYED WHILE HIGH, LATE
SEASON FLOOD WATERS RECEDE. THEREFORE, HARVEST IN MAURITANIA'S
BREADBASKET REGION--BOTTOM LAND STRETCHING FROM ORSSO TO KAEDI
AND SELIBABY WHICH NORMALLY PRODUCES FROM 65 TO 76 PERCENT OF
THIS COUNTRY'S NORMAL 100,000 MT CEREALS CROPS--MAY NOT BE ALL
IN UNTIL MID-MARCH.

3. THOUGH ALL ABOVE IS ENCOURAGING, MONTH OF SEPTEMBER IS
CRITICAL. CONTINUED LIGHT RAINFALL IS ESSENTIAL, PARTICULARLY
FOR FORAGE AND FOR UPLAND CEREAL CROPS. LAST YEAR, GOOD
PASTURAGE IN EASTERN MAURITANIA WAS RUINED BY SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER
HOT SNAP WHICH BURNED GRASS TO THE ROOTS AND KILLED OFF SCANTY
UPLANT MILLET CROP IN MANY AREAS. MOREOVER, OFFICIAL ASECNA
RAINFALL STATISTICS FOR AUGUST ARE STILL NOT AVAILABLE FOR
MAURITANIA. THOUGH MANY AREAS (INCLUDING KAEDI) APPEAR TO HAVE
RECEIVED ABOVE AVERAGE RAINFALL, WE HAD NO INFORMATION FOR
MOST FARMING AND GRAZING REGIONS. THIRDLY. THROUGH GIRM
AGRONOMISTS ASSURE US THAT SEEDS FOR UPLAND AND BOTTOM
LAND PLANTINGS WERE AND ARE AVAILABLE IN ABUNDANCE, PROVINCIAL
OFFICIALS--FOR EXAMPLE THE GOVERNOR OF NEMA--ARE NOT ALL
THAT CONFIDENT THAT FARMERS HAVE THE SEEDS THEY NEED TO
PLANT THEIR NORMAL ACREAGE. WILL BEGIN HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF
CROP PROSPECTS BY LATE OCTOBER, WHEN IT WILL BECOME POSSIBLE
ESTIMATE WITH SOME ACCURACY TOTAL ACREAGE PLANTED ALONG
SENEGAL RIVER BOTTOM LAND BELT. SHURTLEFF

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